

1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Year B

A woman stands in front of the large window at Tullamarine airport, her eyes scanning the skies as she waits for the plane bringing her husband home. A father climbs a hill to the lookout, exercising his hope that his youngest son will come home soon. Young parents wait with growing expectation for the birth of their child. An old man sits in a nursing home, still waiting for the day when his family will visit him. All of them wait, and that waiting tests the quality of their hope. They are powerless to bring about what they hope for; all they can do is wait.

Waiting is part of life and there is no life without it. All of us waited to be born, waited to be nourished, waited to be loved. We learn soon enough that the fullness of life is not available to us like instant coffee. There is always more to life and to people than we can ever manage to absorb at any one time. So, we have to wait.

Advent is the time when we are reminded that we have to wait for God, too. We cannot grasp God, we cannot possess God, we cannot see God; we can only wait for God to let himself be known.

The theme of waiting is to be found in each of the readings for this Sunday. When St. Paul wrote to the Christian Church at Corinth, there was an expectation that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. Having rejoiced in the resurrection, the Christian community expected Jesus to return very shortly as they thought he had promised. As the early Christians waited, they could easily become distracted, tend to lose heart and fail to trust in God. Paul reminds them that the Lord will keep them steady and guiltless as they wait in hope. He encourages them to continue to trust in God and that God will provide for them during their waiting.

The theme of waiting dominates the Gospel, as well. Jesus encourages his followers to stay alert and awake as they wait for Christ to return. The people to whom St. Mark wrote needed to be sustained in their faith as they faced adversity and persecution. St Mark encourages his listeners to be alert and ready.

And in the first reading, the prophet Isaiah writes to the Jewish people in exile in Babylon. Babylon is like a wilderness for them as they long for their

homeland. He offers them hope that God, who seems distant, will save them once more and lead them to freedom. Their waiting in exile will come to an end with the reign of a new king, Cyrus. The scriptures offer hope for the experience of waiting – in exile, in sickness – waiting to see God face to face.

For the sick, waiting for the medical appointment or the healing of illness can lead to despair. Today's Mass offers a message of hope that waiting is not in vain. God will sustain those who wait and trust in God. God is close, although very often God may seem very distant. Was there ever a more pathetic cry which spoke of the distance of God than the one Jesus cried from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Yet God did not abandon his Son.

Advent is a reminder to all of us that Christians are waiting for the Second Coming of Christ. Perhaps some feel that they have grown slack in the Christian life during the last year or have lost focus on Christ. When visitors are expected there is much activity – cleaning, preparation of food and drink, different clothes to be worn. When nobody is expected, there is a tendency to fall back into old habits and perhaps be complacent. As await the celebration of Christ's birth, this season is an opportunity to focus once more on Christ, who is the deepest meaning of Christmas. He is the gift that can bring true hope and joy to those who long for new life.